

**Kathy J. Kater, LICSW**

*Psychotherapist / Eating Disorder Treatment and Prevention Specialist*

2634 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue East

North St. Paul, MN 55109

Phone: (651) 770-2693 • email: [kathykater@isd.net](mailto:kathykater@isd.net)

**FTC - Weight Loss Advertising Workshop - Request to Participate, P024527**

Please consider my request to participate on Panel #2, discussing the state of the science.

**Expertise:**

- Twenty five years in psychotherapy practice, twenty two in which I have specialized in the treatment of body image, eating and weight concerns.
- Six years specializing in the primary prevention of body image, eating and weight concerns.
- Author: ***Healthy Body Image: Teaching Kids to Eat and Love Their Bodies Too!***, 1998, published by *NEDA*, 603 Stewart St., Suite 803, Seattle, WA 98101  
[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org) A comprehensive, primary prevention curriculum for upper elementary school age children based on the prevention principles currently recognized by experts in the field, and designed to prevent body image, eating and weight concerns *before* they start. Recommended by the U.S. Dept of Health Dept of Women's Health in their *Bodywise Packet* for educators, *Healthy Body Image* is among the first of its kind to show significant positive outcomes in promoting healthy weight related attitudes and reducing the risk factors for disordered eating in pre-pubescent and adolescent children.
  - ◆ *Used in schools throughout the country, the lessons in this curriculum teach specific concepts and tools now needed by children in order to resist falling victim to (among other messages) the bogus demands and claims of today's diet advertisements. The very fact that such lessons are needed by children even at this age, and that public and private education funds are being spent to provide curriculum for this purpose is testimony to what is wrong with the prevalence, target audience, and content of advertisements created by the diet industry in the U.S. today.*
- Developer of the ***New Model for Healthy Body Image***: A comprehensive model designed to challenge six prevalent myths in the American culture that actively promote unhealthy body image, eating and weight problems, while providing antidotes (health concepts) needed to resist these toxic myths.
  - ◆ *Nearly all of these six myths are routinely, repeatedly and dangerously transmitted to children, their parents and their educators through diet advertisements.*
- Related research publications:
  - Kater, K., Rohwer, J., & Levine, M.P., *An elementary school project for developing healthy body image and reducing risk factors for unhealthy and disordered eating. Eating Disorders: Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, Wtr, 2000, Vol. 8.
  - Kater, K., Rohwer, J., and Londre, K., *A controlled evaluation of a school program for prevention of body image and eating concerns, Journal of School Health*, Vol. 72, May, 2002.
- Nationally respected authority on the risk factors for body image, eating and weight concerns in developing children and adults, and a champion for primary prevention and secondary intervention initiatives.

- Nationally sought after speaker and trainer for professional and lay audiences (vitae available on request).
- Author of *Real Bodies: A Guide to Preventing Body Image, Eating and Weight Concerns Before They Start*, submitted for publication 9/15/02.

**Contact information:** All information is included in the letterhead above.

**Statement reflecting knowledge of the issues :**

Body angst among girls is rampant in America, and is increasing among boys. "Feeling fat" is the primary complaint, regardless of actual size, shape or weight. In response, the majority of youth are known to engage in unhealthy, counterproductive, weight-loss directed eating that is ineffective at best, eliminates important nutrients needed for growth, teaches them to be preoccupied with, ashamed and afraid of their hunger, predictably results in compulsive or "binge" eating and weight gain for many, and is a primary risk factor for dangerous and consuming eating disorders. At a time when children and young adolescents should feel secure in their body's growth, developing confidence in habits that would help them to become healthy adults with healthy, diverse weights, American children are anxious about size and afraid to eat normally. Ironically, in the same four decades in which the drive to be thin has produced the greatest weight loss efforts ever known to humankind, America has become the fattest nation on earth! **Clearly something is wrong with our normative approach to body image, eating, and weight for such a condition to exist. Among other less concrete factors, here are several prevalent toxic cultural myths known to have contributed to this shocking situation. One significant source and conveyor of these myths is the preponderance of advertisements presented by the weight loss industry.**

The means by which weight loss advertisements promote the risk factors for body image, eating and weight problems fall into two broad categories.

- 1) The content of advertisements for weight loss diets and products actively transmit at least five of the prevalent cultural myths that promote body image, eating and weight concerns in our culture. Through words or images supporting the position that "dieting," diet products or body building products are the cure for the "wrong" body, virtually all advertisements explicitly or implicitly assert that
  - a) Looks are a critical factor in desirability, and a thin body is an essential criteria in achieving the "right look."
  - b) The existence of fat, in any amount, is bad.
  - c) Anyone can achieve the "right" (thin) body if they do the "right" things."
  - d) "Dieting" for weight loss is an effective weight loss strategy (effective defined as a lasting, healthy outcome).
  - e) Healthy eating and lifestyle habits are too hard to maintain and the outcomes are overrated. Quick fix approaches are a better choice.

The above destructive myths asserted by weight loss advertising stand in stark contradiction to the concepts generally agreed by experts to be essential components of a healthy body image and healthy eating. **Specifically, diet advertisements implicitly or explicitly reinforce ignorance or denial in the American culture regarding:**

- a) the inherent genetic diversity and worthiness of varied body sizes and shapes.

- b) the influence of the internal weight regulatory system that defends predisposed body composition, location of fat stores, appetite and hunger.
  - c) the counterproductive effects of hunger restriction or eating according to externally prescriptions at the expense of satiation of internal hunger cues
  - d) the research on the failure of weight loss "diets" in general, including the relationship between "dieting" and weight gain.
  - e) the research which states achievement of a healthy weight is most successful under the following conditions: hunger is satisfied completely with a variety of wholesome foods in combination with a physically active lifestyle.
  - f) the fact that how we look is not more important than who we are.
- 2) **The target audience for diet advertisements is virtually never specified. Therefore, the vast majority of diet ads imply by their directive, unqualified headlines, such as "Lose Weight Now!," that no one (regardless of age, size, medical status or other important exemption) is immune from the need to lose weight.** Ads appearing everywhere urge weight loss with no suggestion that there are many *who should not* consider themselves to be a part of the target audience. This is particularly dangerous in regard to children and teens, especially with a whole new thrust of weight loss advertisements targeting teen markets through teen radio stations and print.

Almost from the time they are born, children are exposed to and eventually bombarded with demands from diet advertisements to "Get Rid of Fat Fast!" In this light, we cannot be surprised when studies show that roughly one-third through sixth grade students, regardless of size, worry that they are "too fat," and have already tried dieting. Even teachers and parents of pre-school and kindergarten age children tell us their young students talk about "needing to go on a diet." Such children are good students of the daily lessons their culture sends them through the media. By early adolescence, 65 to 85% of girls, and an increasing number of boys do not like their bodies and have assumed the "dieting mentality." Studies show that in the 1960s, these figures were reported to be in the 30% range, and in the 1950s, prior to the mass advertising of diets as we know them today, such body image problems and unhealthy weight loss diets were uncommon. Without a doubt, the ever growing proliferation of unqualified, blatantly deceptive, purposefully misleading diet advertising has contributed to this unprecedented loss of body integrity in our nation's youth and adult population.

**As a result, schools across the nation have reluctantly been forced to accept the need to spend valuable, limited classroom time and curriculum dollars to purchase lesson plans to educate children to resist (among other medium) the seductive promises of weight loss advertisements.** Such lessons would not be a necessary part of our children's health education if the weight loss industry were finally regulated with the health of the consumer, and particularly that of vulnerable children at heart.